

THE INTRODUCTION

By Victor Mapes

SIX O'CLOCK at night on board the *Majestic*. Four bells were just sounding, and nearly all the passengers had gone below. The great expanses of shadowy deck seemed silent and deserted.

A door opened from the smoking-room, and a young man, of fashionable appearance, stood a moment in the flood of light. Then he closed the door behind him, and, after pausing at the rail to scrutinize the aspects of the sea and sky, he started forward on a lonely promenade, walking with slow, exaggerated strides.

Thorndyke Allen was slender of figure and rather below the medium height, but he bore an air of conscious superiority that never forsook him on even the most trivial occasions. His manner was studiously deliberate and impressive.

His face might be called aristocratic looking. It was long and sharp, and very pale, with an arched nose and thin, bloodless lips, which curled readily into an almost imperceptible sneer. His sparse hair, growing high off the forehead, was almost colorless, and brushed down flatly from a part in the middle. The eyes were of a faded, almost transparent blue, rather small than large, and possessed of a peculiar restlessness.

He belonged to an exclusive set in New York's social world. Having no special occupation to interest him, he had learned to derive his chief pleasure in life from a sort of secret satisfaction with himself. It had become a second nature with him to pose. His real character, moreover, was in many respects the very opposite of his assumed one. Beneath the surface, for instance, he was extremely nervous and shy. At the slightest emergency his heart would flutter violently; cold perspiration moistened his hands, and a helpless sensation overcame him. On such occasions, he was conscious of appearing stiff, and the possibility of being ridiculous frightened him. In short, like many people who have been pressed into the social mold, he was continually ashamed of his inherited feelings, and endeavored to suppress the smallest trace of them in his actions. He desired, above all things, to be considered an experienced and accomplished man of the world, the quintessence of social etiquette.

The *Majestic* had left New York on the previous afternoon, and for more than a day Thorndyke Allen had been living in a state of tremendous anticipation. The night before his departure Delancey Drake had found him at the club, and announced the news; the Van Rensselaer Browns were booked for his ship.

Miss Van Rensselaer Brown was a well-known Washington belle, strictly good form and very exclusive, with a widespread newspaper reputation for her brilliant accomplishments. Her father's fortune, variously estimated and commented upon, was a matter of public concern, entitling the family, as it did, to an unquestioned position in America's aristocracy. The success of Miss Van Rensselaer's Brown's debut had naturally found its accompaniment in the usual rumble of small talk. Not the least important of the conjectures thus set afloat was her prospective engagement to a foreign nobleman of distinguished lineage, who had been a guest of her father's while on a diplomatic mission to our country.

Delancey Drake was an ardent admirer of the Washington belles. He congratulated Thorndyke Allen on his good luck, and gave him a letter of introduction.

The talk of a foreign marriage, he said, was nothing but newspaper calumny. Miss Van Rensselaer Brown herself had confided to him her sentiments in the matter. If ever she contemplated a change of residence, she had affirmed, her inclination would carry her no farther than New York. Thereupon Delancey Drake drew his own conclusion.

"A week on an ocean steamer, my boy, is a deuced good place for persuasion, and—and, you know—well, I envy you the chance."

And so saying, he had thumped Thorndyke Allen emphatically on the back, while they ordered drinks.

The first twenty-four hours of the trip had been rough and foreboding, and as far as Thorndyke Allen could discover, neither Miss Van Rensselaer Brown nor her father had appeared on deck. That afternoon, however, a change had taken place; the storm waves were gradually left behind, and, with the rising of the moon, had come a beautiful evening. The indications seemed to assure the continuance of fair weather. As Thorndyke Allen scanned the horizon he looked forward with a mingled feeling of impatience and hesitation to his official introduction on the morrow.

Little by little, as he paced to and fro, he fell to silent musing. He thought back on the words of Delancey Drake, and added a taster to their meaning. He pictured to himself the exchange of formalities with Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown, the scene of his subsequent meeting with the daughter, and the gratifying impression his appearance must produce. Then, his imagination gradually spreading its wings, he passed through a charming series of late-rites in secluded corners of the deck, in which his dignified behavior found ready response in the eyes of the Washington beauty, until gradually she assumed in his presence an attitude of

unbounded admiration. And as the fanciful visions floated by his mind grew more and more romantic, until finally his beating heart allowed him to believe that he was on the eve of an adventure—a quiet, sentimental adventure whose sequel was filled with delicious episodes.

Half an hour had passed, and Thorndyke Allen, still in the midst of his musing, was following his promenade toward the stern, when all at once, as he traversed the shadow of a life boat, he became aware of a feminine silhouette standing out plainly in the moonlight. He slackened his pace unconsciously, to observe the slender figure as it bent down gracefully over a steamer chair. She was evidently attempting to disengage her rug, which had caught in a hinge, and held fast obstinately.

Meanwhile, Thorndyke Allen, not yet

in his steps, she quietly and naturally by his side.

"What a delightful night it is!" he said at length, turning as he spoke toward the dark waves where they stretched out trembling in the moon path.

"Yes, it is beautiful," she answered, with a low tremor in her words.

It was indeed a night to be remembered, one of those rare moments when the beauty of nature seems unassumed as it rises up over the boundless immensity. Earlier in the evening, heavy, threatening clouds had obscured the full moon, and cast an inky aspect upon the water. Remnants of the clouds were still left; but now they floated gently in the heavens, while the moon shone down from a clear sky, and the moonlight only served to catch the light and heighten its varying splendor. A nimble breeze raced with the steamer's

white, which whirled through the air bewilderingly. Then gradually the horizon reappeared. Far away on the boundless waves a tiny speck of yellow light, a pinhead of fire, was all that remained of the passing ship.

As Thorndyke Allen turned toward his silent companion, a hurrying form stationed itself at the railing not far from where they stood. The captain was on the quarter deck in company with two of his officers, while an air of bustle and excitement prevailed among the sailors. Three of them had been distributed along the ship's side, where they stood waiting for the boatswain's whistle. Each carried a short black stick of signal powder and a lantern with which to light it. Thorndyke Allen pointed out the men, and made a display of his nautical wisdom in explaining their maneuvers.

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"Aye, aye, sir," said the boatswain from his position on the deck below.

"Let her go, then."

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homespun goods, and the minute peculiarities of cut, were all designed to create an illusion. The cap, of like material, was also the result of careful and painstaking attention, though it presented no feature of originality noticeable to an in-experienced eye. The costume was completed by shoes of darkly polished Russian leather, and by a black pearl of imposing dimensions resting on a model silk tie.

A murmur of admiration had reached his ears from an adjoining table as he took his place for breakfast. He was assuredly on the best of terms with himself that morning. And while touching his rail and coffee with an air of supercilious indifference, assumed for the benefit of onlookers, he smilingly collected his emotions of the previous evening, and congratulated himself that his conduct had been unobserved.

In the smoking room, after breakfast, he had met Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown and had formally introduced himself with the aid of his letter. Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown had declared himself delighted to make the acquaintance of a friend of Delancey Drake's, expressing, at the same time, the great pleasure he would take in presenting Mr. Allen to his daughter as soon as occasion offered. Then, after a few minutes of conventional talking, with remarks on the weather, Mr. Brown had, of a sudden, remembered some matters to be arranged with the purser, and excused himself.

An hour had since passed by, and Thorndyke Allen, conscious of the ap-

proach and then about the water, about a sailor's life, about soldiers, and the European armies, of icebergs, whalers, and other incidents of his many previous trips. He answered for the most part in monosyllables, smiling sweetly from time to time when he made a point, and following all he said with what was evidently a modest, girlish interest.

He was more than content with himself as he passed from subject to subject, in his deliberate hesitating way. With flattered vanity, he smiled back in answer to her smiles, and listened deferentially to her low, short replies. And now and then, as the talk went on, he found occasion to steal soft glances deep down into her limpid blue eyes.

They had been standing there together for some time, when a dance began among the stateroom passengers on the deck below. The notes of an accordion attracted a crowd of spectators, who left their steamer chairs to press about the railings that commanded a view from above.

"The stateroom passengers are amusing themselves," Allen suggested.

"Would you like to watch them a minute?"

Again a look of distress flitted over her countenance, and for an instant she held back dubiously, as though fearful of accepting his invitation. Then, in the absence of a plausible reason, she allowed herself to consent, and they walked forward to the crowd that was looking down on the deck below.

"I always like to see them dance," he volunteered, with a touch of disdain in his voice, after they had taken in the scene. "They seem to enjoy themselves so much."

They were leaning against the railing, his head quite close to hers, and he saw her nod, while he was speaking, to some one across the bridge. Following the direction of her eyes, he perceived a tall blonde girl, smartly dressed and of rather haughty demeanor, who stood at the railing opposite. As she was smiling back at his companion, Thorndyke touched his cap with a stolid dignity that would have done him credit on the most fashionable avenue of New York.

Then, by chance, he noticed Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown, who also happened to be stationed opposite; and it was not altogether with displeasure that he found himself observed in conversation with the winsome creature at his side. Mr. Brown raised his hat respectfully as their eyes met, and was answered with another composed salute.

Thorndyke Allen was readjusting his cap to its exact position on his carefully arranged head, when he became conscious of a movement at his shoulder. His companion had slipped away quietly from the railing, and seemed to be hurrying to get beyond his sight. He was surprised and confused at this discovery, and instinctively turned to follow her. But he checked himself at the thought of appearing ridiculous, and leaning over the railing with an assumption of renewed interest, he pretended to take no notice of the desertion.

There was a lull in the dancing below, and the crowd of spectators had gradually dispersed, some to take up again the interrupted promenade, while others returned to the torpor of their steamer chairs. Thorndyke Allen remained for a while at the railing, and attempted to think himself amused by his strange adventure. Then, as he began his measured strides once more, he came upon Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown, who seemed to be seeking him.

"Mr. Allen, my daughter is on deck, and I should be happy to present you to her."

"You are very kind, I assure you, Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown," responded Allen. "Nothing in the world could please me more."

Mr. Brown touched his arm and guided him forward, along the deck, and across in front of the cabin to the other side of the ship.

"She's right here," he said, as they turned the corner.

A slender figure in a blue serge gown was standing by a steamer chair just in front of them. It was she! Allen's heart gave a mighty leap and throbbed beating madly, while his thoughts swam round like a man who suddenly finds himself overboard, struggling with the waves. Mingled with the consciousness of being a fool, there came a flush of wild elation that carried him back to his romantic visions. What would she say? And what should he?

A girl in the steamer chair was saying something to her, as they approached, and she was attempting to answer. But she had evidently caught sight of him, and, looking quickly away, she blushed violently.

"My daughter, let me present Mr. Thorndyke Allen," Mr. Brown said to the slender girl in blue, but her crimson face was still bent down. Then he glanced at the other in the steamer chair. It was the tall blonde who had nodded when they were watching the stateroom passengers, and she was Miss Van Rensselaer Brown!

Allen made a worthy effort to cover the error, by twisting his body to the steamer chair. Then, with the greatest presence of mind, he straightened himself formally and half turned, smiling to the standing figure in blue. He was expecting to be presented to her also, and for a minute the pause was awkward. The smile hardened on his face and distorted his features. Mr. Van Rensselaer Brown and Miss Van Rensselaer Brown seemed suddenly deprived of the power to speak.

It occurred to Allen that, inasmuch as he and the girl in blue had been seen talking together on the deck, it was natural to suppose them already acquainted. So he bowed to her deferentially, wishing that he knew her name. Then, with an assumed assurance, he addressed Miss Van Rensselaer Brown. "This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, "to find you and Miss—no, find you two acquainted," and with a graceful sweep he glanced at them in turn. One was blushing violently, while the other's face was filled with laughing eyes. The girl moved restlessly. No one spoke.

The conviction dawned on Thorndyke Allen that something was wrong, but he succeeded in retaining his self-composure, and waited inquiringly for the mystery to be solved.

Miss Van Rensselaer Brown looked at him with a strange expression, she looked at her father, and finally at the girl in blue. The silence continued until it became embarrassing. Then an unpleasant smile came over her face.

"You've made a mistake, I think, Mr. Allen. That's my maid."



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quite free from the influence of his meditations, hesitated with a movement of discreet curiosity, and awaited developments. The young woman bent over with renewed efforts; then, desisting momentarily, she stood up and glanced about her with a show of helplessness. A second later, she seemed suddenly aware of his presence. At the same instant, he awoke to a sense of the situation. Removing his cap, he stepped forward, with an air of extreme formality, and proffered his assistance. "Can't I help you?"

"Oh, thank you! You are very kind."

He leaned over, and, pulling the chair toward him with great precision, pushed it together a little so as to open the joint. The rug came free.

"How awfully stupid I was! Thank you very much." There was a wrap on the back of the chair, and a book lay under it on the deck. He picked up the book, and, handing it to her, began to fold the rug in his consciously deliberate manner. She glanced down until he had finished. Then, as she looked up with her hands outstretched, the soft light of the moon fell upon her face.

For the first time he saw her distinctly, and hardly knowing what he did, he paused.

At another time, or amid other surroundings, the effect could not possibly have been the same; but the chords of romance within him had already been set vibrating by his fanciful dreaming. The absence of onlookers, who might have diverted his attention, the simple unconventionality of the situation, and the lonely grandeur of the night, all conspired in her favor. For an instant he forgot himself in a shock of delight, as he gazed upon her, the oval of her face, the timid, delicate mouth, her graceful figure, and the little gloved hands, were all characterized by a tenderness and modesty that waited through him like a perfume. Her skin was very fair, but now a bashful tinge overspread it, and added to a general air of embarrassment. The veil she wore, drawn up beneath a dark blue yacht cap, half concealed a pure low forehead, and her eyes, which were cast down, nestled softly on a background of abundant brown hair.

Suddenly the lights were extinguished, and, taking refuge in an artificial attitude, addressed her again. But here regained her composure, and with a sweet and simplicity that surprised her.

"Won't you let me carry the rug for you to the head of the stairs? You weren't going to take it below, were you?"

progress, rolling the surface of the sea long and low swell. Meanwhile, the distant noise of the engines and the steady swash from the bow chimed the voluptuous of a Summer night on the steamship of a Summer night on the steamship.

Allen sought for something to say—something that might sound impressive, in keeping with the scene. But he could find nothing, and made a remark which seemed to him hopelessly commonplace.

"What a mistake it is for people to go below so early! They miss the pleasant time."

Before he had finished speaking, they had reached the door, he held it open for her; and, as he did so, he looked again upon her face. His state of mind was such that with a little more courage, he would have dared to tempt her back into the moonlight.

She turned her head slightly, as if to aggravate his longing, and hesitated a moment, with her foot upon the sill. Then she stepped in. Following her through the door, he placed the rug, but he had been carrying with the pile on the bannister.

"Thank you very much."

Again he searched vainly for a reply in time with his feelings. "I assure you."

He stared at her, and felt foolish. Then, removing his cap abruptly, he backed off toward the door.

No sooner was he on deck, however, than he perceived in the distance an excuse for new found courage. In an instant he was before her again on the landing.

"A vessel is signaling us," he said, "and we are getting ready to answer back."

In the midst of his words, a sudden confusion came over him, and he regretted his effrontery. The girl looked up at him in a frightened way, and cast a timid glance about her, while telltale crimson flushed hurriedly over her cheeks. He made an effort to be reassuring.

"I—I thought perhaps you might enjoy seeing it. It won't last but a minute."

She moved forward without speaking, and passed on before him into the night.

"See the lights off there?" he said, pointing out over the water. "One might think she was in distress. Here come our sailors with the signals, I think we could see better if we went up forward a little. Let me take your wrap, won't you?"

She allowed him to take the wrap, and once or twice in going forward, as they stepped over a chain or rope, she felt his hand upon her arm. Then, with a word, he guided her to the rail, where they leaned over, side by side.

The ship they were passing was far off in the distance, almost obscured by the lights of the horizon. The lights of the water were reflected in the colors in long resplendent lines, which flickered and glimmered under the ruffling breeze, like polished gems. Suddenly the lights were extinguished, as simultaneously and completely as if a mighty breaker had rolled over the ship and dragged her to the deep.

For a minute their blinking eyes saw nothing but phantoms of black and

white, which whirled through the air bewilderingly. Then gradually the horizon reappeared. Far away on the boundless waves a tiny speck of yellow light, a pinhead of fire, was all that remained of the passing ship.

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proving glances his elegance inspired, was parading, with an affected air of preoccupation, along the rows of steamer chairs. On one of his countless turns he happened to carry his steps a little farther aft than usual, when all at once there passed through him the faintest thrill of trepidation, like an echo of his feelings on the night before. He looked again to make sure.

The slender, willowy figure, which he recognized without difficulty, was standing alone at the stern, the little gloved hands on the railing, the face bent down toward the water.

Allen looked away and smiled at the thought of his weakness, now that he was in the presence of a blazing sun and the humdrum bustle of the world. Then, without apparent hesitation, he obeyed a secret impulse and continued his march toward her.

She was clad in a blue serge gown, with a little jacket to match, the essence of simplicity. Her yachting cap was the same as on the night before, but now the veil was down, and as he drew near it was possible for him to distinguish only the vague outline of her features. But there was nothing to conceal the lustrous dark hair that gleamed in the sunshine, the gracious pose of her head, and the of a tiny white ear.

He approached her wholly unawares, and stood a moment at her side, while she still looked out over the expanse of rolling water.

"Good morning! Isn't the weather beautiful?"

As he spoke, she turned with a timid start, and seemed half inclined to save herself without a word. His manner, however, was reassuring, and with a tremulous little smile she answered him.

"Good morning."

Allen talked to her about the weather